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The Grace of Courage.

A SERMON

PREACHED

On Commemoration Day,

JULY 3, 1886,

AT

ST. PETER'S COLLEGE, RADLEY,

BY THE

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CANON OF CHRIST CHURCH.

Printed by request.

PARKER AND CO.

OXFORD, AND 6 SOUTHAMPTON-STREET,
STRAND, LONDON.

“ Who is the happy warrior ? Who is he
That every man in arms should wish to be ?
. . . He,—Who if he be called upon to face
Some awful moment to which Heaven has joined
Great issues, good or bad for human kind,
Is happy as a lover ; and attired
With sudden brightness, like a man inspired ;
And, through the heat of conflict, keeps the law
In calmness made, and sees what he foresaw ;
Or if an unexpected call succeed,
Come when it will, is equal to the need.”

A Sermon, &c.

I ST. PETER iii. 14, 15.

*Be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled ; but
sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.*

THERE is, I think, in this First Epistle of St. Peter a peculiar force of pathos and of authority which comes, in part at least, from this : that the experience of his own life, the manner in which his own character has been formed, is clearly present to him as he writes. He himself, and his own inner history, are "hidden and yet felt" throughout his letter : there is,—if we may borrow words used of uninspired teaching,—“a fine and subtle infusion of the man into his work^a :” he would “lead us to God by a way along which he has gone himself ;” there is the most delicate reserve, but still he writes as one to whom it has not come easily to be what he is, one in whom Grace has had to deal with a dangerous temperament, one who has learnt insight and compassion and sobriety and gentleness through the crises of an anxious life. And so the whole Epistle, it has been truly said, “is the following out of our Lord’s command to its writer, ‘And thou, when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.’”

St. Peter knows the difficulties about which he

^a Mr. Phillips Brooks’ “Lectures on Preaching,” p. 118.

writes : and he knows also the powers of recovery and of conquest. And surely we feel the presence of this knowledge in his heart as in the words of the text he teaches us how to deal with the threats and fears of this world,—teaches us the great secret of courage. “Be not afraid,” he says, “with their fear :” do not be frightened by the things that frighten those who live only for this world, the things with which this world would scare you ; “neither be troubled : but sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord.” Surely as he so wrote he must have been recalling to himself some thought of that stormy night of misery and terror when the fears of this world came about him, and he failed. It had seemed impossible to him : impossible that even the masterful violence of death itself could wrench his will from its allegiance and devotion : he was forewarned, forearmed : he knew that the trial was coming, and knew who was assailing him, Who had prayed for him : all that forethought and reason and love could do for him was done : all that could brace and steady a man to bear a trial had been granted to him :—and then it all seemed driven away like smoke, scattered and overwhelmed as dreams are by the reality of day, when the threatenings of the world began to come on him, as the maid-servant recognised him by the firelight : the show of courage tottered and fell at the first touch of terror : he was frightened, and he failed. He must have been remembering it, I think, and remembering, too, how God had forgiven and restored him, and taught him the real secret of courage even

unto death, when he wrote to his brethren, probably just as persecution was breaking out upon them : “ Be not afraid with their fear : ”—do not let anything that men can threaten, any terrors of this bragging world, overpower you or scare you from your faith and hope and love :—“ but sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord.”

The secret of courage—it is impossible, I suppose, to measure how much turns upon our really gaining it ;—really becoming courageous. Courage is, indeed, the safeguard of every other grace or virtue that we can desire for ourselves or for others. A character amiable and even admirable in other respects yet lacking courage, is like a country that is fertile and delightful, highly civilized perhaps, and brilliant in literature and art, but incapable of self-defence, and only the more imperilled by the charms which disguise its feebleness. It is by a true insight that courage has been enthroned in an almost unique pre-eminence both in popular and in scientific morality. The taunt or suspicion of cowardice is intolerable to us at any period of our life : where we know our courage to be least we are most anxious to conceal our weakness : we are miserable—are we not ?—if we have been betrayed or startled into shewing ourselves cowards. And, on the other hand, nothing so thrills men’s hearts with an irresistible enthusiasm as the sight or hearing of a great act of courage. Qualities which may dazzle us at other times are at once thrust right into the shade by the simple magnificence of such an act : perhaps the one spectacle which has

within recent years held all England in one interest and one anxiety, has been the spectacle of an heroic courage in the struggles of the Soudan. And this instinct of ordinary men is confirmed by the judgment of the greatest minds that have ever studied human character. Plato, in the dialogue which he devotes to the subject of courage, seems almost to acquiesce in a view which would make courage co-extensive with the whole of virtue^b: as though there were no trait of a noble life which is not dependent upon this. And Aristotle places courage first in the whole order of human excellence^c, or joins it with justice alone as pre-eminent for the blessing and service of mankind^d. Both would agree that in all the work of education there is nothing more urgent, nothing more essential, than the gaining of that inward strength which through all assaults of danger and sorrow and desire and temptation keeps the will steadfast and the judgment true concerning that which is and that which is not to be feared^e.

And surely, brethren, as we think of the dangers of our own day, of the conditions under which those who now are young will have to play their part, we must long and pray for this above all—that there may ever be guarded and honoured in our schools the true conception of courage, the true sense how a brave man should live, and, when need comes, should die. Through all the ways of modern life, through all

^b Plato, *Laches*, pp. 198, 199.

vi. 1.

^d Arist., *Rhetoric*, I. ix. 6, 8.

^c Aristotle, *Ethics*, III.

^e Cf. Plato, *Rep.*,

429, 430.

the work a man may have to do, in every trust that he may have to bear, does not this seem almost year by year to grow in difficulty and in preciousness : --that he should keep his will steadfast and his judgment true concerning that which is and that which is not to be feared? "Be not afraid with their fear, neither be troubled:" what wiser or more saving counsel could be pressed upon a man as he goes out to face the manifold temptations of University or of London life? Be not afraid of seeming strict and unpleasant, or of making yourself unpopular, when a coarse story is told in your presence, and you know that it will seem odd if you don't laugh at it, and that you will make enemies if you have the courage to leave the room. Be not afraid when you know that you will seem unlike other men in your own set unless you run up bills which you cannot pay, or, while the poor are starving, lavish money on meaningless and unreasonable luxury. Be not afraid to read, and to own that you intend to read, to recognise a real responsibility for your chance of getting as ready as you can for the problems of our life in a sinful, suffering, unsettled world. Be not afraid to call sin and vileness by their right names, even though the world has ordered that they shall be called fun, or independence, or the sowing of wild oats. Be not afraid of seeming dull or narrow or old-fashioned in simply clinging to the faith in which you have found the best help and guidance of your boyhood, though a group of clever men around you may sincerely and sorrow-

fully doubt, or, in some cases, senselessly despise it. In all these ways the fears of this world may come about you :—it seems to you now, perhaps, as it seems to us in later life, strange that they should have such power to shake a man's purpose as undoubtedly they have :—but University life, at least, is in large part conventional and arbitrary : and it needs some courage to hold one's own, to keep to the straight line, to be loyal to the true aim, through all its variety and confusion and occasional incongruity. Ah ! you know not, brethren, how we long for more and ever more in Oxford who will bring among us that great grace of courage, who will not be afraid to bear witness—silent witness, it may be, but clear and strong as the voiceless might of the incoming tide on a calm day—the witness of a faithful, steadfast life, sure of itself, its purpose, and its God. You know not how many, both of younger and of older men, are helped and upheld by the strength of such a life ; how many even of those who make its difficulties may be secretly longing so to live, may silently perhaps some day return to seek again by the example of that life the light and grace that they had loved long since and lost awhile. “ Be not afraid with their fear, neither be troubled : ” right on to the very end of life we need it, all of us, this grace of true and simple courage. It will make us more than conquerors over all that degrades and enfeebles many lives. It will keep us from the weakness of compliance with ways we do not quite approve—of assent to statements we do not clearly

understand. It will guard us from the worst dangers of partizanship, and help us to see truth and right wherever they may be : it will utterly prevent that miserable doom of the heart that cannot do without the praise of men, that is ever more anxious and less successful in the effort to please : that lives in dependence upon every verdict save on His alone Who, as we believe, shall come to be our Judge.

Surely it is a thought that we may put in the front of our thanksgiving to Almighty God for all the blessings that He has granted to many in this place, that here in Radley the secret of true courage is not forgotten or ignored. For the one sure principle of a brave and steadfast life is that to which St. Peter points us — that we should sanctify in our hearts Christ as Lord : *Κύριον τὸν Χριστὸν ἀγιάσατε ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν*. By no negative precautions against the dangers and delusions of the world are we to secure our courage, but by the strong and positive and engrossing concentration of our hearts in allegiance to Him Who died for us. His service is our perfect freedom : no cowardly complaisance, no bewildering timidity, no enfeebling terror, can have power over the life that is indeed devoted to Him. “Who is He that overcometh the world, but He that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our Faith^f.” We are told on every side that there are strange perils coming upon us, new forms of trial hovering in the air. And we can hardly doubt that there will come,

^f 1 St. John v. 5, 4.

before many years are past, some changes and perplexities which will demand an especial degree of calmness and of courage. In such times it is comparatively easy either to be stubborn, or to make compromises : but courage has a higher, harder wisdom to teach us. And the secret of courage is the consecration of the heart to Christ its Lord. Nothing, nothing but that will keep us quiet and brave and steadfast throughout all that lies before us. And it is no new commandment, no untried armour, that St. Peter gives us. All down the course of history we see the majestic, fearless forms of those who by that Faith out of weakness were made strong to overcome : the most heroic courage that has ever honoured our manhood has been the courage of the saints. The grandest scenes that rise above the level plains of life are those in which for the love and fear of God men have counted as a very little thing the utmost terrors of the world. These are scenes, it has been said, of contrast between spiritual greatness and human greatness : and the triumphs of the spiritual greatness are but anticipations of the final triumph of good over evil^g. The array of this world seems overwhelming and irresistible ; its pomp is splendid ; its variety bewilders us ; its complexity entangles, its attractions dazzle us. But in reality, in truth, in very deed, as before God, the spiritual greatness of one faithful heart devoted to His service is nobler and greater

^g Dr. Mozley, "Parochial and Occasional Sermons," pp. 83, 93.

than all else : for the world is passing away and the lust thereof ; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. Oh, brethren, cherish with resolute loyalty and in loving obedience all that here you have learnt of Him and of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord : sanctify Christ as Lord indeed in your hearts : enthrone Him there as He comes to you, full of grace and truth, in the Eucharistic mystery : let Him, with that surpassing Love and Light and Peace which He, He only, brings and is, occupy ever more and more your inward being : and then, —be sure of it,—He will lead you safely through whatever troubles you may have to face, whatever strain may be put upon your courage. Whatever comes, it will not be a fiercer trial than that over which, again and again, He has made His saints, slaves though they were, or tender-hearted women, or even children, victorious and triumphant. Only sanctify Him in your hearts as Lord : in great things and in small seeking simply the approval of His voice : “for never”—to quote the noble words of one who knew indeed how to take the measure of this life—“never in this mixed world did a single Christian soul offer to God the sacrifice of a practical confession of Him, by standing apart from the ways of the world—not accepting its voice, not yielding to its spells, or being overawed by its shows ; never did any one face any measure of adversity, or gloom, or isolation, or deprivation, as the consequence and penalty of bearing witness to Divine truth, and expressing that truth in action.

but he had, like the three witnesses" against the pride of Babylon, "in that adversity a companion : there was Another in the fire walking with him : and that Other was the Son of God ^h."

^h Dr. Mozley, "Parochial and Occasional Sermons," p. 95.



